A photograph of a forest recovering from a fire. In the foreground, a large, dark, charred tree trunk stands prominently. The ground is covered with vibrant green ferns and other low-lying vegetation. In the background, many thin, bare tree trunks reach up towards a clear blue sky, indicating a mix of dead and surviving trees.

RIM FIRE RECOVERY UPDATE

Fall & Winter

The Decision

THE RIM FIRE created a variety of challenges for Forest managers who aimed to strike a balance between competing interests. The U.S. Forest Service is a multiple-use agency so public safety, ecological integrity, scientific research and socio-economic benefits must all be weighed when making land management decisions.

Impacts for the selected option, which is a Modified version of Alternative Four (MAF), can be viewed online along with the Record of Decision at: http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=43033

Complex mega-fires, like the Rim Fire, can create serious adverse effects across the landscape and those effects add a layer of complexity to the decision-making process. Consider some of the values at risk that needed to be accounted for within the process:

- Water & power supply for 2.5 million people in San Francisco was impacted;
- \$900,000 was spent to purchase alternative energy for the San Francisco area;
- Hwy. 120 corridor and businesses leading up to Yosemite National Park were closed;
- 5,000 households were evacuated;
- Health concerns due to smoke impacts became an issue;
- Hydrologic function along steep slopes became a serious concern;
- Spotted Owls lost valuable, mature forest habitat;
- Migratory deer herds were impacted;
- Environmental health benefits lost between \$100 million to \$736 million in the first year;
- Local economy lost approximately 1.8 billion dollars;
- Suppression costs tallied \$127 million;
- Burned Area Emergency Response costs added an additional \$10 million;
- 11 homes and numerous outbuildings were consumed by the wildland fire;
- Thousands of snags pose a safety concern post-fire; and
- Fuel loadings will rise as snags topple over.



The Rim Fire Record of Decision was signed on August 28 by Susan Skalski.

“The USFS is attempting to do a recovery on a scale which has never been done anywhere on the National Forest system,” said Randy Hanvelt, Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors, District 2. “They have encouraged input from every responsible organization willing to participate in the collaborative process.”

Stark issues such as these have faced the Forest and team of scientists who have been busy finalizing the Environmental Impact Statement. The aftermath of this firestorm, and its repercussions, has had a tremendous impact on the local area on a variety of levels.

The intent of the final decision, MAF, is to serve the greater good as much as possible, while juggling competing needs. In working toward a balanced EIS and decision, it became clear that no perfect answer exists. Scientific principles were also applied as well as an extensive collaboration with stakeholders and interested parties.

Based on public input, the Forest Service scaled back on the scope of this choice to take into account environmental concerns, while balancing the need to remove the dead wood component from the forest. Up to 33,083 acres will be available for salvage when combined with the additional hazard tree removal outlined under this option.

Approximately 2,200 jobs will be generated in the process, boosting the economy for Mariposa and Tuolumne Counties, which have higher than average unemployment rates for the state. Meanwhile fuel loads are lessened and safety risks to the public are mitigated.

MAF addresses health and safety issues, to both wildlife and the public. The decision accounts for sensitive and indicator species such as the Black Backed Woodpeckers and Spotted Owls. Soils and watershed, which were heavily impacted by the high-intensity fire, were also taken into consideration especially in regards to amphibians. Public concern regarding the desire for no new permanent road construction was also addressed and implemented.

“Susan Skalski and her staff should be commended for the extraordinary effort and for formulating a reasonable, balanced solution. Now the debate should be over. We need to get the job done with a sense of urgency. All of the forest dwelling species need their homes back,” said Hanvelt.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED
VISIT OUR WEBSITE
www.fs.usda.gov/main/stanislaus/workingtogether
 Learn about Rim Fire Recovery volunteer opportunities.



Groveland District Office under siege by the plume dominated Rim Fire, August 2013.

Fire Resilient Landscapes in the Sierra

LEARNING TO LIVE WITH WILDFIRE continues to be an issue facing the West. Fire-prone landscapes form the backdrop for our homes, businesses, churches and essential infrastructure. Every year, huge wildland fires race through the countryside destroying public and private lands alike. Unfortunately, intense fires, like the Rim Fire, are becoming more common.

Since 1970, 98 percent of forest fires have been stopped in the initial attack stage, keeping them at less than 100 acres. The remaining two percent of fires are the ones you read about in the news: Yarnell Hill, South Canyon, Zaca and Rim. When environmental conditions, such as climate change, drought, steep terrain, low fuel moistures and atmospheric instability line up, you can expect the “perfect firestorm.”

Oddly, keeping fire out is not the answer. Excluding fire is a short-term solution that only adds to the problem.

In response to societal fears about the destructive nature of fire, land management agencies began an aggressive campaign to put out wildfires in the early 1900s. In order to conquer the West, man also had to conquer wildfire, or the fear of it. Protecting homes, livestock and infrastructure became paramount. In doing so, man had, at long last, gained some measure of control over the wilderness and their lives.

In modern times, this situation is no longer sustainable. So how can we adapt? Since fire does not recognize

boundary lines, collaborative efforts amongst agencies is in order. In 2010, The Forest Service engaged in communications with the Department of the Interior, along with other fire organizations to create a national cohesive fire strategy.

Restoring healthy, resilient landscapes is a part of the plan. Fire is a natural element and has been an integral force in shaping many California ecosystems, as well as other landscapes across the west. Ponderosa Pine forests are an example. Historically, this Sierra forest type would have a normal Fire Return Interval (FIR) of about 15 years. In the absence of this natural fire cycle, fuels build up and the structure of the forest starts to change.

Saplings and brush move in while dead logs and forest litter accumulate. If many cycles of the FRI are missed, shade tolerant trees like White Fir take over. Forest gaps narrow, as firs make their way up and between the more sun-loving pines. Soon branches and limbs intermingle and canopies become crowded. Over time both the horizontal and vertical fuel structures change, creating ripe

conditions for a fire to remove the entire tree stand.

Under the cohesive strategy, intentionally ignited fires (prescribed burns) will be used to help restore forest health. Prescribed burns are one of the more cost-effective methods for restoring landscapes. They enable managers to get rid of excess fuel, while mitigating safety risks near homes, heavily traveled roads and public facilities. Planned burns are lit under stringent parameters to ensure success. Smoke makes them unpopular, and yet in fire-prone regions the smoke is likely to occur one way or the other. With prescribed fire, managers have the option of choosing ignition days wisely to minimize smoke impacts. Smaller chunks of land can be ignited to lessen smoke as well.

Nothing is bullet-proof with fire, but we can either be Rim Fire reactive or we can be proactive by removing fuel on our own terms.

Managing unplanned ignitions to achieve resource benefits is another option under the cohesive strategy.

“That means selecting the right fire, at the right place, at the right time,” says Fire Management Officer Chris Schow. “It also requires that you have enough staffing on hand to handle the fire.”

Not stamping out every new fire start that gets a foothold in the Sierra is also important. Smoke impacts and temporary closures are likely to result as fire is transitioned back onto the landscape.

To finish reading this article online, visit: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/stanislaus/home/?cid=stelprd3814207>

To read more on the national cohesive strategy, go to: <http://www.forestsandrangelands.gov/strategy/index.shtml>.

STANISLAUS NATIONAL FOREST OPEN AREAS AS OF SEPT. 10, 2014

For more details on openings and closures, please contact the pertinent district office.

Mi-Wuk Ranger District
209-586-3234

Summit Ranger District
(not affected by fire)
209-965-3434

Groveland District
209-962-7825

Calaveras District
(not affected by fire)
209-795-1381

Closures are also listed at:
www.fs.usda.gov/detail/stanislaus

WEBSITES TO VIEW

USFS Rim Recovery page:
www.tinyurl.com/khlhbpr

Record of Decision at:
www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=43033

Google **Liz Miller and the Rim Fire** to learn more about student art work depicted in this newspaper.

National Cohesive Fire Strategy details at: www.forestsandrangelands.gov/strategy/index.shtml

Hunting Information
Hunting maps and open seasons are visible at: www.dfg.ca.gov/wildlife/hunting/deer/deermaps.html or call **CA Department of Fish & Wildlife:** 209-234-3420

Stanislaus NF now on Facebook! Join us, *Like* and *Share* the fun!

AREAS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC (9/10/2014) MI-WUK RANGER DISTRICT

- ❶ Hull Creek OHV Riding Area
- ❷ Crandall Peak and Deer Creek Riding Areas
- ❸ River Ranch Campground
- ❹ Hull Creek Campground
- ❺ **Fraser Flat Campground CLOSED FOR SEASON** (not pictured)
- ❻ Riverside Day Use Area
- ❼ North Fork Day Use Area (Tuolumne River)
- ❽ Fraser Flat Day Use Area (not pictured)
- ❾ Lyons Reservoir Day Use Area (on PG&E land)
- ❿ Cottonwood Road (1N04) is open until it hits the closure area
- ⓫ 3N01 is open to the Bourland Meadow and Box Springs trailheads

SUMMIT RANGER DISTRICT

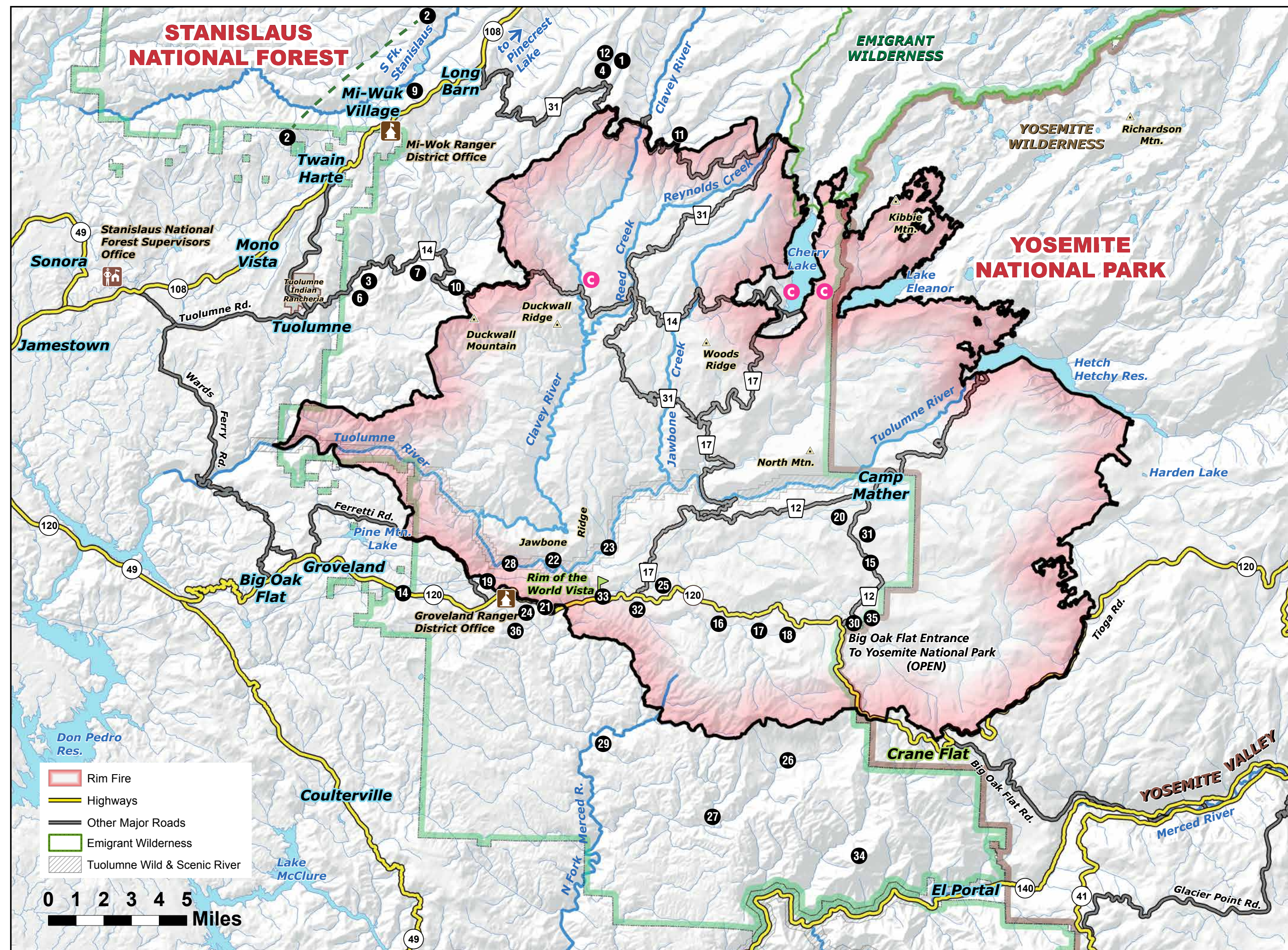
- ⓫⓪ Clavey River from 3N26 above Hull Creek Campground (North end only)
- ⓫⓫ Aspen Meadows Pack Station (not pictured)

GROVELAND RANGER DISTRICT

- ⓫⓬ State Highway 120
- ⓫⓭ Evergreen Road (county road)
- ⓫⓮ Harden Flat Road – west of Yosemite Lakes Road to Highway 120
- ⓫⓯ Yosemite Lakes Road (county road)
- ⓫⓰ Access to Sunset Inn via Golden Arrow Road to Harden Flat Road
- ⓫⓱ Lumsden Road (Forest Route 1N10) between Ferretti Road and Lumsden Bridge Campground
- ⓫⓲ Dimond O Campground
- ⓫⓳ Lost Claim Campground
- ⓫⓴ Lumsden Campground
- ⓫⓵ Lumsden Bridge Campground
- ⓫⓶ Pines Campground
- ⓫⓷ Sweetwater Campground
- ⓫⓸ Anderson Valley Dispersed Camping Area
- ⓫⓹ Montgomery Gulch Dispersed Camping Area
- ⓫⓺ Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River open for boating
- ⓫⓻ Bower Cave Day Use Area
- ⓫⓼ Carlon Day Use Area
- ⓫⓽ Middle Fork Day Use Area
- ⓫⓿ Rainbow Pool Day Use Area
- ⓫⓾ Rim of the World Vista Day Use Area
- ⓫⓿ Trumbull Peak Day Use Area
- ⓫⓿ Carlon Fall Trailhead
- ⓫⓿ Little Golden Forest Trailhead

OTHER NOTED CLOSURES (see website for complete list)

- ❶ Sand Bar Flat Campground and Day Use Area are CLOSED (not shown)
- ❷ God's Bath, Cherry Lake and Trailheads to the East are CLOSED

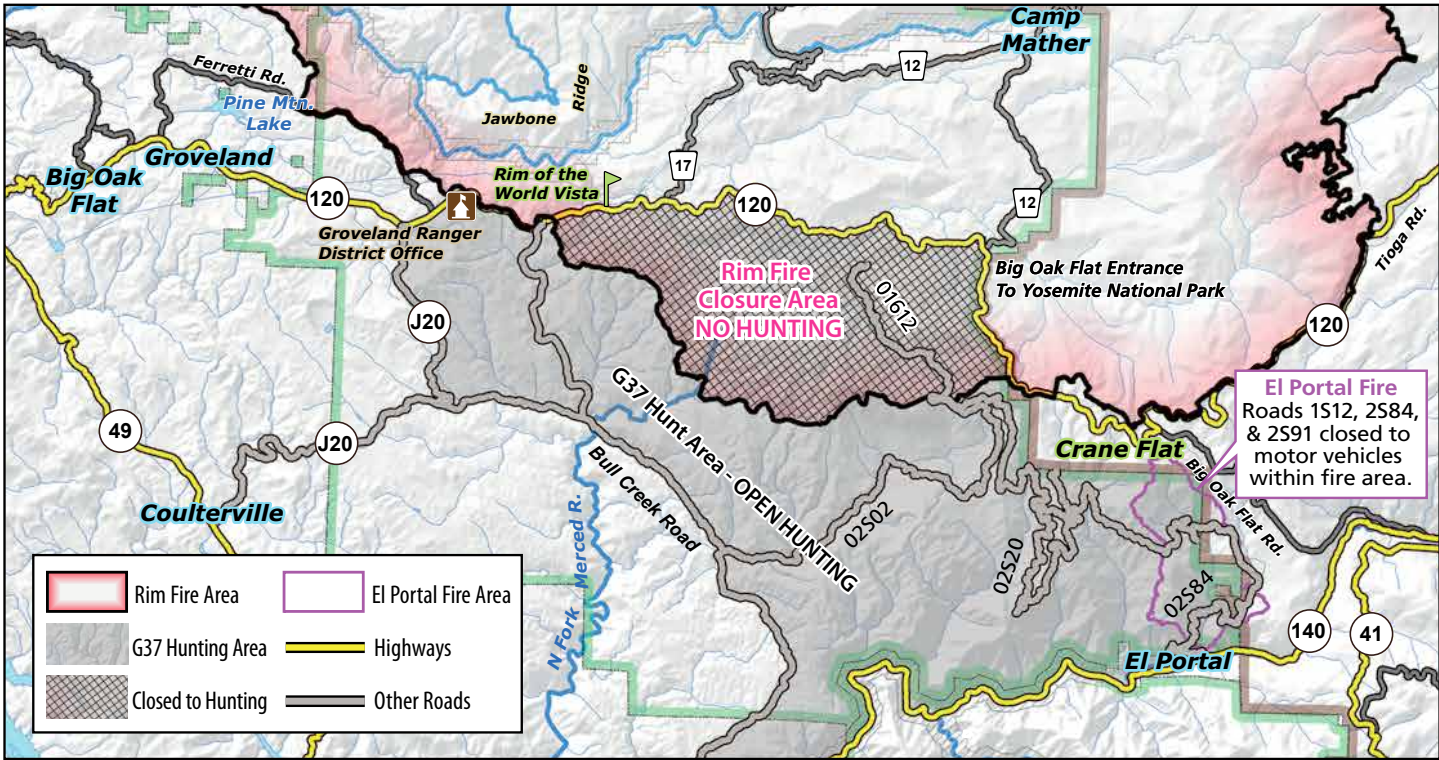


Deer Hunting After the Rim Fire

IT'S THAT TIME of year again. You can smell and feel it in the air - crisp and piney, chilly nights. The Sierra skies hold a leaden, hopeful look that hints of pending weather. It's time to don boots and jackets and dust off your hunting gear, big game season is upon us.

Hunters throughout California will soon be heading into the woods to find their prized buck. This year special attention is needed when entering hunting zones for any type of game. Though you may have a hunting tag from the California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), closed areas on National Forest land are still off limits this deer season. The Rim Fire Closure Order 2014-01 is in effect until Nov. 18 and will likely be extended with modifications, depending on public safety concerns.

According to CDFW officials, hunting tags purchased this year are only valid through this current hunting season, even if a zone was impacted by the fire. Zone maps and season dates are posted at: www.dfg.ca.gov/wildlife/hunting/deer/deermaps.html. The Dept. of Fish and Wildlife can be reached at (209) 234-3420 for information as well as regulations regarding licenses, tags and lotteries. A check station near Long Barn will



Review forest closures before seeking the perfect buck this season.

also be staffed Sept. 20 and 21 to monitor harvested deer and answer questions. Due to closures in some of the zones, the tag quota for deer was dropped from 10,000 down to 6,000. Deer, like other wildlife in the burned area, have been impacted by the fire. Statewide, migratory deer herds are on the decline. Some of their habitat and food was destroyed last year. Damage to oak trees has a long-term impact on acorn production, a primary source of food for deer. Though oaks readily resprout from the base, it takes roughly 25 years to produce a solid acorn crop. Lean times can result when plants decline and nut crops have not yet rebounded. Post-fire plant cover does provide some valuable forage for wildlife in the interim. Though it may seem like deer are thriving, because of their numbers in

residential areas, these “residential” deer are not to be confused with migratory deer herds found in the forest. Poaching, habitat loss, being eaten by mountain lions and parasites are other factors affecting the migratory deer population. For the past six years, CDFW has been studying local deer herds by using GPS devices in deer collars. Tracking the radio-collared deer provides data on the number of deer in a given area and their length of stay, seasonal fluctuations of movement, preferred travel routes, lay-over spots during migration, locations preferred by does and fawns as compared to bucks, and survival and population patterns. As you dust off your rifle this season and start daydreaming about walking through the woods in search of game and the perfect five-by-five wonder, remember it pays

to plan ahead. Not all U.S. Forest Service offices are open on weekends. Obtain maps and other information before your hunt begins. District office contact numbers are provided on the centerpiece map. The adjacent map depicts where deer zone G-37, which encompasses A-21 and J-15, overlaps with the closed area. Zone D-6 is far too large to display on the map and the Rim Fire is located within its boundaries. Hunting in D-6 is allowed, so long as you stay out of the Rim Fire perimeter and its associated closure. Information is available at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/stanislaus/>. Snags, which are commonly found in the burnt forest area, can cause serious harm. There are a multitude of hazards present in the forest, so please adhere to forest signs, obey all fire restrictions and have a safe hunting season.



Finding common ground has empowered YSS to move forward on restoration projects.

Finding Common Ground with YSS

Mike Albrecht, abridged version

THE YOSEMITE-STANISLAUS SOLUTIONS (YSS) collaborative group is a highly diverse coalition of interests who share a common goal: restoring and maintaining healthy forests and watersheds, fire-safe communities, and sustainable local economies using a science based approach. Though originally founded to find common ground, tackling difficult resource management issues became its primary concern after a field trip in 2010. For YSS, that field trip was pivotal in bringing the group together. Positive change happens when people get involved and focus on a desired outcome. YSS envisioned a healthy forest. Though comprised of diverse stakeholders, the group realized that if they didn't learn to work together that natural resources and the quality of life provided would be at risk. Disagreement and stalemate were soon replaced with enthusiasm. Funding was secured from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy for a wide variety of projects, including: forest thinning, meadow restoration, as well as road and culvert repair. When the Rim Fire hit, the group was catalyzed into action. It was obvious that salvage logging, followed by reforestation needed to happen quickly. Despite the controversy surrounding the logging, YSS supported the U.S. Forest Service in moving the recovery process forward.



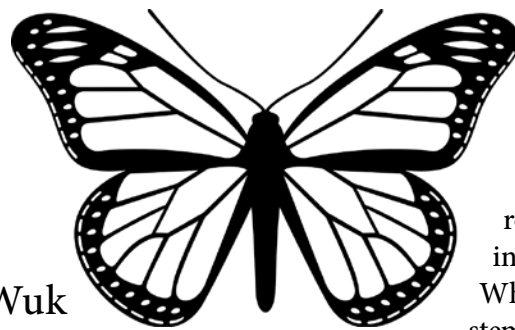
KAITLYN JOHNSON

Life survives amongst the ash...lupine, poppies, coyote mint.

Traditional Me-Wuk Plants

PLANT LIFE IS SACRED to many indigenous people throughout the world.

The Tuolumne Band of the Me-Wuk Indians is no exception. A strong connection with the earth and its natural forces brought the Rim Fire to the Tribe's attention. For centuries they lived closely with Mother Earth, gathering plants for sustenance, basket making, healing and spiritual purposes. By setting regular ground fires, they managed the land to remove excess fuel and increase the productivity of specific plants. A recent tour of the burned area revealed that many plants important to the tribe are thriving in the post-fire environment.



Oak trees are revered by the Me-Wuk. In the past, the trees provided acorns that sustained the Tribe through cold winter months. Scattered throughout the Sierras are bedrock mortars once used for pounding shelled acorns. These crushed nuts were then rinsed multiple times to leach out bitter tannins before boiling them with water and hot rocks to make soup. Extra acorns were stored in granaries called chakkas. Fish, deer meat and other wild plants like onion, lupine seeds and lily bulbs rounded out their diet.

Seeing black oaks resprout following the fire brings joy to Tribal members, according to Reba Fuller, Government Affairs Specialist for the Tribe. While oaks played a vital role in the lives of their ancestors, the trees are still important to tribal members today. Respect is thus bestowed on this mighty tree.

Milkweed is another plant that responded well in the wake of the Rim Fire. Fibers extracted from the stalk were rolled into cord used in crafting fishnets.

White sap, found in the stem, was applied topically to cure warts and skin disorders. Botanist Carl Linnaeus named the genus of the plant *Asclepius* after the Greek God of healing.

Pesticides and the destruction of wintering grounds in Central Mexico have caused Monarch numbers to plummet, according to the Monarch Taskforce. Having the plant spring up post-fire, does however, provide a critical food source for the growing larvae.

Soap Root, along with nearly 20 other traditional plants, has sprung up in the blackened soil. Medicinally, the mashed bulb of this plant can be used to treat poison oak. Though not toxic, the mash was also used to stupefy fish, making them easier to catch without affecting the quality of the meat.



In traditional cultures plants, trees and rocks all have spirits. The spirit of Coyote Mint makes it a good rinse for eye infections. Fire scars in old Sugar Pine trees render a sugary sap favored by the elders, but the treat was also shared with the children. Incense Cedar is admired both for its beauty and the role it plays in the tribe's round bark houses. Juice from Jimson Weed keeps feathered regalia clean and has the spirit of keeping bad medicine at bay.

"The Rim Fire has created a sense of community with the Me-Wuk and the local people," said Fuller. "In 2013, Forest archaeologists worked closely with the tribe to protect cultural sites threatened by the rapidly paced fire." Tribal members have been generous in sharing traditional ecological knowledge with the agency in return.

To learn more traditional plant uses, consider reading the "Field Guide to Plants Important to the Central Me-Wuk Indians." The book was produced to share cultural information on native flora.



USFS

Me-Wuk Indians used Soap Root to treat poison oak afflictions.